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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: SIX-PARTY TALKS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused coverage February 16 on the ruling by the Taipei District Court in former PFP Chairman James Soong's slander suit against President Chen Shui-bian, who had claimed that Soong met with China's Taiwan Affairs Office Director Chen Yunlin in the United States in 2005. The court found that President Chen's remarks were based on unverified information, and ordered him to pay Soong NT\$3 million [US\$92.3 thousand approx.] in compensation and to post an apology on the front pages of three major newspapers: the Liberty Times, the China Times, and the United Daily News.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the centrist, pro-status quo "China Times" focused on the establishment of the Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism outlined February 13 in the Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks. The analysis founded that the establishment of the mechanism is in the interest of every party to the Talks. End summary.

¶3. "Will there be a Peace and Security Mechanism in Northeast Asia?"

A column in the centrist, pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] said (02/16):

"In the 'February 13 Joint Statement' of the 'Six-Party Talks,' all the parties agreed to establish five working groups -- Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, Normalization of DPRK-US Relations, Normalization of DPRK-Japan Relations, Economy and Energy Cooperation, and a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism -- to carry out the initial actions and to fully implement the Joint Statement.

"The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism is listed as the last working group, but this is a very important foreshadowing. This is because when the four other tasks are completed, or near their completion, a mechanism is needed to secure these accomplishments and to incorporate politics, economics, diplomacy, and military security for long-term purposes. Isn't it another version of the 'Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe'?"

"China is surely the country that proposed the motion, and the motion must be in the interests of China. But what are China's interests? China's interests are to develop its economy and strengthen its national power when the peripheral environment is stable, and peace and stability in Northeast Korea can safeguard this advantageous environment.

"After several rounds of the Six-Party Talks, one successful joint announcement and one joint statement have given China a major role in using its good offices for peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula. These achievements also prove that China has the capability of doing so. If China further carries out tasks

involving peace and security in Northeast Asia, no country would oppose it. China will not play a major role, but it has the most powerful influence, just like its role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

"What are the reactions from other countries on this matter? With regard to the United States, the future of the Korean Peninsula is unpredictable. Since North Korea possesses nuclear weapons, it is impossible for it to abandon them. The future development between South Korea and North Korea is also subtle. Any confrontation between China and Japan is not in the interests of the United States. A peace and security mechanism in Northeast Asia would allow the United States to avoid several risks, and let the U.S. deal with matters in other regions.

"If North Korea is allowed to keep its nuclear weapons, this mechanism would be very advantageous to the country, since the mechanism can end North Korea's isolation. South Korea could also carry out South-North reconciliation under this framework, and march towards unification of the Korean Peninsula.

"Russia does not have a position on getting involved in matters in Northeast Asia. It is everything Russia hopes for if the country can get involved through the mechanism. With regard to Japan, its major strategy is to keep its close alliance with the United States. On the basis of this mechanism, there are more advantages than disadvantages to Japan in participation in a peripheral peace mechanism."

YOUNG